13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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quartzites. The bed-wing gives a narrow room additional width where it is most needed, near the fire. It may be that sufficiently long timbers for sizeable rafters were not easily procured in these mountain regions of poor soil. We may be dealing, however, with a feature which has died out in other regions and which has lived on in difficult country. The built-in wall-bed—the half-neuk—is known in the Orkneys, the Faroes and in the Hebridean black-houses and is characteristic of humble societies in other parts of the world. It is possible that in Ireland the wall-bed attests contacts with western Scotland which have repeatedly influenced that part of the country running south-westwards from Co. Antrim following the 'Caledonian grain' to Connacht. In any case the wall-bed appears to be restricted to the extreme north-western fringes of Europe.

The open hearth with all its associations is truly the heart and centre of house and home. The fire is, with her children, the 'care' of the woman of the house. 'A woman can never go to the fire', runs an Irish saying, 'without tampering with it.' The manifold duties of the housewife keep her moving about the hearth, tethered to it for most of the day. Her last duty at night is to 'smoor' it, burying a live turf in the ashes to retain a spark which can be fanned into a blaze next morning. This custom was fortified by the belief that the good folk, the fairies, would be displeased if there were no fire for them through the night. I have sat at fires which, it was claimed, had not been allowed to go out for over a century, or for as far back as family memory could go. It is to the fireside seat that the visitor is invited, for this is the place of honour, and it is around the fire that tales of old time are told. The magic of the open fire, playing upon the fancies of generations who have gathered round it, has engendered a host of beliefs and portents. The fire can give warning of wind and weather, of lucky and unlucky visitors, of marriage and death. Above all, it is a shrine to which ancestral spirits return, a link with the living past.[1]

[1]Since this chapter was written A. T. Lucas has published (in *Arctica*, 11, 16–35) an account of Wattle and Straw Mat Doors in Ireland. See page 65.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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POTS AND PANS

a late Neolithic burial cairn at Lyles Hill near Belfast I found tens of thousands of potsherds which had been collected from domestic refuse and thrown into the cairn during the course of its erection.[1] The broken plates which may be seen exposed on the graves in some old burial-grounds in Co. Mayo are probably placed there in continuation of ancient practice. The breaking of pots is one of the elements in Hallowe'en pranks—one might almost say rites—and again we notice the association with the dead, for All-Hallows is the time when the dead are believed to return to their homes.

It would appear that by breaking a pot you broke its spirit; and by transference the power of the dead to do harm. Readers will recall the significant lines from *Hamlet*, referring to the suicide of Ophelia: 'Her death was doubtful . . . for charitable prayers, shards, flints and pebbles should be thrown on her.'[2] In some places in south-west England potsherds figure in the 'lent crocking' rites at Easter: like Easter eggs they are symbols of fertility. The association of fertility and decay, of life and death, comedy and tragedy, is clearly displayed in the wake games which are described in Chapter XX. This association, we note in passing, is ever-present in the mind of the Irish countryman, and the juxtaposition gives dramatic quality to the work of many Anglo-Irish playwrights.

This is not the place to enlarge on the technology of early pot-making, but it may be observed that the designs, fabric and finish of the Neolithic family of pottery in Ireland were far superior to those of succeeding periods: indeed it was not until wheel-made pots found local markets in the medieval towns that technically superior vessels were made in this country. In late prehistoric and early historic times the wealthy were able to import fine wares in small quantities from the continent, but the peasant homes over most of Ireland apparently did without pottery—the Gaelic word for potter is a loan-word—and vessels of wood, metal or leather did duty for the now universal imported 'delph'. The Dutchman, Gerard Boate, writing in 1645, said that 'the use of earthen vessels hath been very rare among them, and to the most part unknown even

[1] E. E. Evans, *Lyles Hill: a late Neolithic site in Co. Antrim*, H.M.S.O. (1953).
[2] *Hamlet*, Act V, Sc. 1.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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social and family centre'.[1] The table has never supplanted the fireplace as the focus of social living, a function it has served since the dawn of humanity. As so often happens, folklore endorses this finding: there is an Irish saying that it is unlucky to shake hands across a table. The table or 'board', which in the English language gave its name to a committee, has not replaced the fireside as the place where the Irish countryman talks—and talks business. When food is left out for the fairies or for visitors from the other world it is placed in front of the fire, and at Hallowe'en seats for the returning dead were arranged around the fire.

FIG. 26. Table, cut from the solid, from a Co. Armagh bog. It measures 20 in. by 12 in.

Similarly the fireside, not the table, attracted whatever means of illumination was available. The hob-lamp took the place of the table-lamp. Even when paraffin came in the oil lamp was still hung in the chimney. The older native oils, derived from fish and burnt in open lamps, were very unsavoury, and it was expedient to allow the fumes to escape with the chimney smoke. The iron crusie or open oil-lamp, its shape almost unchanged since classical times, was to be seen nearly everywhere around the coast until late in the last century (Fig. 27) but the paraffin lamp quickly swept it out of existence. Medieval crusies from Spain, Italy and north-western Europe are very similar to recent Irish examples, and it was from the Rhineland, it is said, that the crusie was taken to Pennsylvania, where it first succumbed to the new mineral oil. Stone moulds of uncertain age known from Scotland and Ireland show how the iron pans were hammered into shape. Inland, the place of the crusie was taken by resinous splinters of bog fir kept by the fire till tinder dry,

[1] Å. Campbell in *Folk-Liv* (1937), 234.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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refuge corners of Europe. The gate swings like a fire-crane, not on hinges or rings-and-hooks, but directly on its heel, on a projecting iron spud which swivels in a stone socket. These stone sockets or spud-stones are frequently seen around old farm sites, and very similar stones in Mesopotamia go back into the fifth millennium B.C. In the days before the iron gate was introduced wooden gates were hung in the same way, and we know from Scotland that they were sometimes tipped with stone.[1] A projecting stone perforated to hold the top of the gate-post (Fig. 33) has now been replaced, as a rule, by an iron eye.

In Co. Armagh I have heard the farm gate-piers referred to as the man and wife of the house, and one of the pair may have a flat top whereon, it is said, the fairies like to dance. The old people used to place the two first plates of champ—the Hallowe'en festival dish of mashed potatoes—on the top of the pier.[2] While all this may be nothing more than an exuberant play of fancy we cannot overlook the megalithic practice of selecting alternating pointed and flat-topped monoliths for some of their ritual erections, symbolizing, it is thought, male and female. The twin portal stones of many megalithic chamber graves come to mind, and pairs of such stones now standing in isolation, as at Lisdivin in Co. Tyrone,[3] may well have been a symbolic entrance to some vanished ceremonial enclosure. The tradition of large entrance piers dies hard. Not infrequently today the first thought of an improving farmer is to erect imposing concrete pillars at the entrance to his property. They are as a rule garishly painted and pebble-dashed, a poor substitute for their simple whitewashed forerunners.

In the early nineteenth century field gates were almost unknown except near towns, and we read of the rustic forerunner of the iniquitous barbed wire—a hay-rope strung with thorns.[4] In boggy areas one commonly sees the gnarled root stumps of bog trees doing service as a gate, much as the Canadian pioneer will make a temporary fence with grubbed-up stumps. The huge

[1] A. Mitchell, *The Past in the Present* (1880), 127.
[2] Michael Murphy, *At Slieve Gullion's Foot* (1940), 64.
[3] O. Davies, *U.J.A.*, 2 (1939), 169.
[4] G. V. Sampson, *Memoir*, 288.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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FIXED FESTIVALS

Easter would take us away from our present subject but mention must be made of some of the folk practices connected with Shrove Tuesday, Ash Wednesday, Easter and Whitsuntide. Shrove Tuesday (Shraft) was a time for hunting the hare, and for feasting in preparation for Lent. A portion of the meat was not eaten but hung in the rafters. It was the great day of the year for marriages, and on that night tricks of many kinds were played on unmarried adults and on courting couples who had not fulfilled their promise. They were serenaded with horn-blowing; animals were tied to the doors of their houses, and cart wheels were rolled down hill. At Ardmore in Co. Waterford a piece of symbolic horseplay was performed by the young men on Ash Wednesday. A hollowed stone with a hole in the centre was the scene of the play. In the hole was stuck a wattle with a handful of tow tied to its top, and unmarried women were made to dance around the stone, holding the tow and spinning while they danced. 'The youths then terminated their amusements by dragging them through the village seated on old logs of wood.'[1]

Good Friday was an important day in the farmer's year, the luckiest day on which to begin the sowing of corn. There was an aversion to the use of iron and to the shedding of blood on Good Friday, which was a favourite day for visiting holy wells and the graves of the dead. Shell-fish were eaten, and visits to the shore were enlivened with games and horse-racing. On Easter Day the young folk would be up early in the morning to see the sun dance, and during the day vast quantities of eggs were consumed. The colouring and rolling of eggs are customs kept up by children in many districts. A special Easter Day dance, for which the prize was a large cake exhibited on a garlanded churn-staff, is popularly supposed to have given rise to the expression 'taking the cake', in the sense of beating all comers. If Easter was a lucky time, ominous superstitions attached to Whitsuntide, for example persons born at that time were supposed to have the evil eye, to be fated to die a violent death, or to take a life. A chicken would sometimes be killed in the hands of a Whitsun child to serve as a substitute slaughter. To cross water or go to sea at Whitsun was to invite death by drowning.

[1]E. Fitzgerald, *J.R.S.A.I.* (1856), 48.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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527 372 cairn on the summit of Slieve Croob was until recent years the scene of a great gathering on the first Sunday in August. The fiddling and dancing are no more, though numbers of young people still assemble there and frolic in the heather. Blaeberries (bilberries) were picked into little rush baskets made on the spot (Fig. 70) and that the occasion was recognized as a [584] legitimate time of courting is shown by the comment that 'many a lad met his wife on Blaeberry Sunday'. The name Garland Sunday derives from the hoops decorated with ribbons and flowers which were made by unmarried girls and, latterly, carried to church before being set up in the graveyard to preside over the dancing with which the day terminated. Rites in [769] honour of the dead seem to have marked the old Lammas festival, so that again we notice the association of ancestral spirits with the fertility of farm and family.

527 By St. Bartholomew's Day, 24th August, harvest is well under way and the first-saved corn is ready to be thrashed. By tradition the flails were made ready on this day, and if the high harvest winds are blowing it is said that the saint is testing his flails. Next comes Michaelmas, 29th September, linked closely with the sea, with horses, and, strangely, with the ceremony of killing a cock or a goose, originally as a sacrifice in honour of the saint. In some parts Michaelmas was regarded as one of the most important feasts of the year, but I have not found any districts where it was, as in Uist, 'much the most imposing pageant and most popular demonstration of the Celtic year': nor have I come across any tradition of the rites of digging up and making presents of wild carrots which was associated, in the Hebrides, with the eating of cakes made of mixed flour baked before a stone flag, with the killing of a lamb, visits to graveyards, and a night of 'dance, song and love-making'.[1]

527 769 Throughout Ireland these lesser feast days pale in comparison with the culminating festival which marks the end of the dying year on All-Hallows Eve. An astonishing amount of lore still clings to Hallowe'en, and we must restrict ourselves to picking out some of the main elements of this crowded occasion. The crops should now be all gathered in and no fruit should be picked

[1] A. Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, I (1928), 198.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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after this date, for the *púca*, a supernatural being, is busy befouling unpicked fruit at Hallowe'en. Here again we notice superstition acting as a stimulus towards the completion of routine tasks. The return of the livestock from their summer grazings, once accompanied by their herders, made the occasion one of family reunion, and this is a strong element in the present festival. But it was also a reunion with the ancestral spirits of the family; for Hallowe'en was preeminently a commemoration of the dead, a time when ghosts and fairies were unusually active, the whole of the world of the supernatural astir and the dead returned to their earthly homes. On that night the grass-grown homesteads—the fairy raths—were wide open and the fairies were on the move to winter quarters, surely a folk memory of a former transhumance. It used to be thought unlucky not to make preparations for the return of the dead by leaving the door of the house open, putting out tobacco and traditional dishes such as sowans—a kind of porridge—and setting seats around the fire. The games and amusements which alone survive have commonly degenerated into pranks and horseplay, but one can detect in them echoes of magical observances. The many divination customs may well have begun as rites to avert evil or to secure the benefits which they now pretend to forecast. Among the things involved in these games and divinations are apples, nuts, oatcakes, cabbages, a ball of yarn, articles made of straw and rushes (Fig. 86), and herbs such as yarrow. The wearing of straw dresses and the breaking of pots are certainly archaic elements. In Co. Cork there survived well into last century a Hallowe'en ceremony similar to the well-known Mari Lwyd of South Wales: a procession was led by a figure clad in a white shirt and carrying a horse's head. This 'white mare' was followed by youths blowing cow-horns, and as they stopped to levy toll from farmhouses they recited a long string of verses 'savouring strongly of paganism'.[1] Hallowe'en bonfires and noisy demonstrations remind us that these features of Guy Fawkes' Day have, in England, been stolen from the older festival.

In certain districts, especially in Connacht, north Munster and south Leinster, strange customs have been associated with

[1] *J.R.S.A.I.* (1853), 303—19.

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527 782 the Feast of St. Martin on 11th November. On St. Martin's Eve the blood of a farm animal or fowl was spilled and sprinkled in the corners of the house, on the door-posts and windows, and in the byre and stable. In some areas the blood was also used to make the mark of a cross on the forehead of each member of the household. The flesh was eaten on St. Martin's Day, which is by tradition one of the feast days on which flesh meat is taken.

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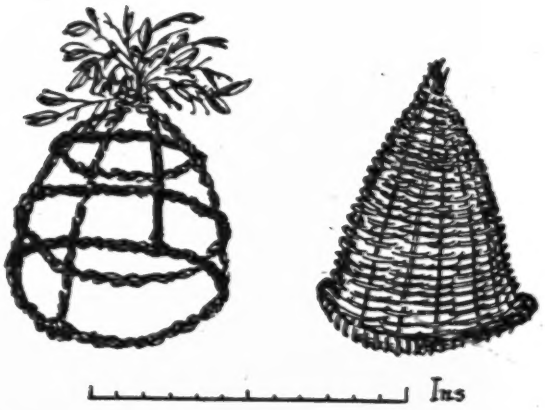

FIG. 86. Hallowe'en caps. *Left:* of plaited straw, Co. Down. *Right:* of woven rushes, Co. Kerry.

We recall that in Scotland a mart was an animal killed at Martinmas to be salted down as winter food, and it may well be that this very practical custom grew out of the cult, which was intended 'to exclude evil spirits for the year'.[1] It seems that seabirds were sometimes killed for the occasion, and there are many superstitions relating to the ill luck which attended anyone who went fishing at Martinmas. Wheel-turning of any kind, whether on cart, mill or spinning wheel, was prohibited. These sacrificial offerings and tabus must be of great antiquity and relate to the preparations for winter. St. Martin's Summer was regarded as the last spell of fine weather before the gales began in earnest. There are hints in folklore that ailing children were

[1] I. Weld, *Roscommon*, 559.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

been blessed, to protect the beast from milk pilfering fairies and hag witches. Among the taboos associated with May Day are those prohibiting the visiting of wells before dawn and giving away fire; as regards the latter taboo, to do so is to "give away the luck of the farm" for a year. Flowers are placed on the altars of the two medieval churches in the early morning of May Day, and at one time garlands of flowers shaped like a horseshoe were hung on door posts for luck. Souls of the dead are especially feared on Allhallows' Eve, and are placated in the Catholic tradition a day later on the feast of All Souls. The telling of stories is tabooed on Allhallows' Day, and the fairies are said to spoil wild blackberries for future eating with their before dawn depredations. My wife and I invited in a small group of islanders to celebrate Halloween in 1959, and we spent much of the evening having our fortunes told by an old man as it was done on this night when he was a youth; he poured melted lead through a key handle into a pan of cold water and made his prognostications by interpreting the configurations formed by the quick hardening metal.

Whitsuntide is the week beginning with the feast of Pentecost, or Whitsunday, but in Inis Beag it extends to the feast of Corpus Christi and is known as the "kinkish time," when once again evil forces hold sway in the island. Usually the weather is "heavy and close" and very changeable, I was told, and people tend to be irritable and more depressed than usual. Men do not cut their hair, nor does anyone wash themselves, during these 12 days. Although the pookah is always a danger, it is more active at this time than during the rest of the year, and children and visitors are warned not to fall asleep outside or even to sit down on the ground unless accompanied by others, whose presence will thwart any attempts by the demon to twist their limbs. Some islanders will not undertake major tasks or decide on important issues during Whitsuntide. Whereas Christmas and Easter are considered "lucky times," the "kinkish time" is unlucky, and those born then may have the evil eye or be destined to die violently or take a life.

In 1960, Corpus Christi was celebrated June 16th—two days after pattern day and eight days before St. John's Eve. The latter is one of several midsummer celebrations reported from Ireland which mark the summer solstice. Boys gather wood and tend a huge bonfire lighted just after sunset on the common land of Inis Beag, and a few islanders carry coals from it to their homes and fields for protection and to guarantee the fertility of their wives and female livestock. A man complained to me that an infection in his son's finger was caused by the failure of the boy to procure a coal from the fire as instructed. On that evening, the folk congregate outside of their cottages and along the terrace roads to watch the hundreds of bonfires alight on the mainland coast. In the past, cows were driven between twin bonfires as at Beltaine, and barren women and those yet to marry leaped over the dying flames. One of the most brilliant satirical novels of Irish life—both cruel and insightful—is Tracy's *The Straight and Narrow Path*, the plot of which focuses on the difficulties encountered by a vacationing British anthropologist after he writes for a newspaper an eye witness account of nuns jumping a St. John's Eve bonfire.

The legends are several and varied in Ireland about the life of St. Martin (O Suilleabhain 1957:252–261). There is no saint of this name who is of Irish